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# *The Desire for Good: Is the Meno Inconsistent with the Gorgias?*

TERRY PENNER AND C.J. ROWE

At *Gorgias* 467A-468E, esp. 468C2-8, Socrates puts forward the arresting view that if I (voluntarily) do something and it turns out badly – worse than other alternative actions that were available – then I didn't want to do the action. Thus, whatever one may have thought at the time, one never in fact wanted to do an action if that action turned out badly. Rather, all that is true is that the action in question “seemed best” to one.

At *Meno* 77B-78B, esp. 77D7-E4, on the other hand – at least according to Santas's fine exposition, which has become the standard interpretation of this passage<sup>1</sup> – Socrates seems to say that one can want bad things provided only that one want them believing them to be good. Put in modern terms, one can want things that are in fact bad if one wants them *under the description* ‘good thing’. This is of course just what most modern philosophers – such as Anscombe and Davidson – would want Socrates to say if he was to say something with a chance of being true.

So the two passages seem to contradict each other.

The apparent contradiction can be brought out in another way. At *Meno* 77B-78B, Socrates is arguing that ‘Everyone desires the good’. On Santas's reading of this passage, it can only be saying that “Everyone desires the *apparent* good”. (And such is indeed Aristotle's reading of ‘Everyone desires the good’ when he wants it to come out true [*Nicomachean Ethics* III.4, *Topics* VI.8.146b36-147a11].)<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, if ‘Everyone desir-

<sup>1</sup> G. Santas, “The Socratic Paradoxes”, §2, esp. para. 3ff, in ch. 6 of *Socrates* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979), reprinted from *Philosophical Review*, 73 (1964).

<sup>2</sup> How does speaking of desiring apparently good things (Aristotle) differ from using the schema ‘desires object *o* under description *D*’, and so speaking of desiring bad things under the description ‘good things’ (Anscombe, Davidson, Santas)? Though we reject *both* ways of speaking, we think the ‘under the description’ schema far clearer as a way of expressing this sort of view than talk of an apparent good. An *apparent good*, like an *alleged assassin*, is a combination of an actual thing with a way that thing *appears* (perhaps incorrectly). The ‘under the description’ schema breaks down reference to each such apparent object into reference to its two components – the actual object (which

es the good' is to be interpreted in accordance with the views of the *Gorgias*, it would have to be read as saying that "Everyone desires the *real* good".

It follows either that we have misinterpreted the *Gorgias* passage;<sup>3</sup> or that

shows up in the *o* position) and the appearance that the object gives off to the relevant desirer (which appearance shows up in the *D* position). The *o* position is "transparent", admitting substitution of any true description of the object, whether the agent knows that description to be true of the object or not. We may say that the *o* position gives the "outside" of the object of desire, it being completely independent of how the agent may view the object "from the inside". The *D* position, on the other hand, is "oblique", admitting only substitution of such descriptions as the agent *believes* to be true of the object of desire. We may say that the *D* position gives the "inside" of the object of desire (relative to that agent). The outside of the object can be identified with the Fregean *reference*; and *some* insides – those insides which are *true of*, and uniquely determine, the reference – can be identified with Fregean *senses*. (Those insides which are false of the reference will have to be modified if they are to assign a Fregean sense to the *D* position.)

One benefit which modern philosophers see in thus separating "outside" and "inside" in this way is that it removes the dangers of talk of *apparent objects* or *intended objects*. [This is a benefit which Santas unfortunately forfeits. Having introduced the schema 'desires *o* under description *D*', Santas then reintroduces a distinction between *actual object* and *intended object*. But the notion of *intended object* simply reintroduces the kind of "apparent objects" which the schema avoids. Santas even falls into some confusion over this too: See his hobnobbing with non-existent objects in his n. 22. It is fortunate that these confusions are inessential to the main points Santas is making in his paper. On the other hand, it is unfortunate that, as we shall see, the chances of Santas's interpretation being textually *justifiable* for the *Meno* are far greater using the confusing 'apparent good' terminology, there being no real hope of reading the clearer terminology into the text.]

But modern philosophers have seen another benefit in thus separating "inside" from "outside". For it enables them to say that different people may desire the same thing (since the objects of their desires have the same outside), but have [type-]different desires (since the objects of their desires have different insides). [Compare the way in which Fodor and Salmon argue that people may believe the same proposition even when the psychological states of the people in question – the believings – are type-different. Nathan Salmon, *Frege's Puzzle* (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge MA, 1986), ch. 8, Jerry A. Fodor, "Substitution Arguments and the Identity of Belief", in *A Theory of Content and Other Essays* (MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1990), pp. 161-176.]

We shall call these ways of thinking of objects of desire "descriptionist" or "separationist", for the way in which they separate the object as it is from the description the agent would give of it, only the latter being relevant to the identity of the psychological state in question.

<sup>3</sup> But we think not. See Penner's "Desire and Power in Socrates: The Argument of *Gorgias* 466A-468E that Orators and Tyrants Have No Power in the City", *Apeiron*, 1991, pp. 147-202. Provided only that the view we attribute to Socrates makes *philosophical* sense (as we shall argue it does: §1 below), then this interpretation seems to us secure.

Santas has misinterpreted the *Meno* passage; or – least desirably of all – that Socrates is expressing, in dialogues widely admitted to be close in time to each other, views that are flatly inconsistent with each other.

What we shall argue in the present paper is that, in spite of there being some temptation to adopt Santas's reading of the *Meno* as correct – because of its conformity to modern intuitions about desire for the apparent good, and because of its, at first sight, quite plausible reading of the crucial passage 77D7-E4 – there is an alternative reading which is, at any rate, possible for the crucial passage, and which coheres far better both with the passage as a whole and with the rest of what we see the Socrates of the early dialogues saying about the desire for good.

In §I, we explain briefly the view of desire in the *Gorgias*. In §II, we introduce the crucial passage at *Meno* 77D7-E4, showing how plausibly Santas's interpretation takes the passage. In §III, we deploy our own interpretation of the wider passage 77B-78B as a whole, taken also within the general context of the differences between Socratic and Aristotelian ethics. Then, in §IV, we show how the crucial passage 77D7-E4, which at first sight seems to tell so clearly for Santas's interpretation can, with one small change in punctuation, be read perfectly acceptably in accordance with the natural interpretation we developed in §III.

### I. *Desire in the Gorgias*

A brief word is necessary here about how the account of desire in the *Gorgias* is to be taken. For otherwise it will seem just a silly view, which should, at best, be written off as a temporary Socratic aberration from the saner view that everyone desires the *apparent* good. Still, what we have to offer here cannot amount to more than a brief sketch, since the philosophical issues here are large – involving nothing less than an almost complete repudiation of some standard ways of treating reference within psychological contexts. The fuller exposition of a more general treatment of reference within psychological contexts will be given elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

What makes this interpretation of the *Gorgias* work philosophically is a group of assumptions about those desires to do something which actually result in an action. The first is that

- (A1) no one ever desires to do a quite particular action just for its own sake (for the sake of doing that particular action whatever the consequences might be);<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In Penner's still unpublished manuscript, *Plato and the Philosophers of Language*.

<sup>5</sup> A defence of this assumption would take us too far afield from our present purpose. We reserve such a defence to another occasion. For Socrates as holding this view, cf *Gorgias* 468C3.

rather, any quite particular action which is desired is desired always as a means to some further end, which may itself be desired for the sake of some further end, . . . , which is desired ultimately for the sake of some final end, such as happiness, which is the one thing desired for its own sake.<sup>6</sup>

Thus desire to do a particular action always involves a desire for a (final) end and a desire for a proximate means. Notice, now, before we begin elaborating on the Socratic assumption (A1), that, so far we have nothing incompatible with the Aristotle-Santas-Anscombe-Davidson view that all desire is for the *apparent* good. On that view, (A1) will translate into the claim that

(A1\*) all desire to do something is desire for the apparently best means to the apparently best end.

It will be expected, given what we have already said about the *Gorgias* above, that Socrates will dissent, both on the question of a (final) end and on the question of means.

#### Ia. *Desire for a (Final) End*

Turning first to desire for ends, we get, on the Aristotelian view in (A1\*), that everyone desires as their end their *apparent* happiness, not their *real* happiness.<sup>7</sup> By contrast with this view, we claim that what the *Gorgias* is saying is that

<sup>6</sup> *Gorgias* 467C5-468C8 (though happiness is not mentioned here). For the Socratic-Aristotelian assumption that the means-end hierarchy involved in every deliberately chosen action ends in a single object, see *Lysis* 218C-220B (and for love and desire being treated interchangeably in this context, 221B7, 221E3-4, and 221E7-222A1). For the identifying of the single object as happiness, see *Symposium* 204E1-205B1, and *Euthydemus* 278Dff, esp. 282A1-5. The Socratic-Aristotelian assumption that all chosen actions aim ultimately at a single thing, happiness (or apparent happiness), is of course denied by many moderns who hold that the final ends of particular actions may not only be different, but also incommensurable with each other. We do not in this paper attempt to take account of this important possibility. It will be enough for us if we convince readers on the startling difference that, in para. 3 above, we claim there is between Socrates and Aristotle. Neither Socrates nor Aristotle is an incommensurabilist. [Notice Richard Jeffrey's use of *De Anima* 434a7-10 as an epigraph for his book *The Logic of Decision* (McGraw Hill, New York, 1965).]

<sup>7</sup> To say this is of course not to say that people say to themselves "What I want is my *apparent* happiness, not my *real* happiness". This would be an entirely superficial objection to the Aristotelian and descriptionist view that all desire is for the apparent good. What people say to themselves is of course, "What I want is my *real* happiness". The reason why, according to the Aristotle-Santas-Anscombe-Davidson view, we must nevertheless say that everyone desires their *apparent* happiness is that some people are mistaken in what they identify as their real happiness. Helen, mistakenly identifying her

- (A2) what one desires as one's end is one's *real* happiness, even if that differs from what one thinks it is.

Now, it might seem that (A2) couldn't be right. How can we say Helen desires her *real* happiness (say, successfully actualizing her considerable intellectual and social skills), when what she *goes for* all the time is, instead, the maximizing of bodily pleasure?

We offer here three very brief arguments to indicate the way in which we would defend (A2). First of all, it is surely arguable that the only reason one could have for thinking that

- (E1) Helen desires, as her end, the maximizing of bodily pleasure (her apparent good),

is that

- (E2) Helen (falsely) believes that the life of maximizing bodily pleasure *is*, in her case, her real good.

But then, to get (E1) by a substitution using (E2), shouldn't we have that

- (E3) Helen desires, as her end, her real good?

It is true that moderns will hope to get (E1) from (E2) plus (E3) understood as

- (E3a) Helen desires as her end (what she *thinks of as*) her real good,

rather than as

- (E3b) Helen desires as her end her real good (her real happiness), even if it is different from what she thinks it is.

So further argument will be required. (For the moment our point is just: It is her desire for good which explains her desire to maximize pleasure – which *drives* the desire to maximize pleasure – and not the other way around.)

This brings us to our second argument (borrowed from *op. cit.* in n. 3). This is to point to a closely related phenomenon which appears to give some support to the possibility of reading (E3) as (E3b). Keith Donnellan<sup>8</sup> has argued that when Jones uses the words 'the man in the corner drinking a

real happiness with the maximizing of bodily pleasure, desires as her end the maximizing of bodily pleasure. Since this is *not* what her real happiness is, we must say (according to Aristotelians and descriptionists) that what she desires as her end is her *apparent* happiness – what *appears* to her to be her real happiness.

<sup>8</sup> "Reference and Definite Descriptions", *Philosophical Review* 75 (1966), 281-304. Donnellan's distinction between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions is accounted for by others using a distinction between names and demonstratives on the one hand and definite descriptions on the other. One can sympathize with the formal motives for following the latter course while still thinking Donnellan is the more nearly right.

martini' to refer to someone who is in fact – and unbeknownst to Jones – only drinking water from a martini glass, these words can, in one perfectly standard use, be taken to refer to the man in the corner drinking water from a martini glass. We endorse Donnellan's argument. But we want to go one step further, and argue that in such cases, Jones's *state of mind* is one of intending to refer to the man in the corner drinking water from a martini glass. We are not just speaking of a "transparent" reading of 'Jones intends to refer to *x*' (giving us the "outside" of the object of the intention to refer: n. 2 above). We are speaking of the *inside* of Jones's psychological state. It is Jones's intention to refer to the man *as he actually is* and even if how Jones would describe him is other than how he actually is. Jones wants *how it is with the man in question* to over-ride any errors in Jones's conception of him. (In general, people are well aware that their conceptions, and descriptions, of people they are referring to, are inadequate.) "But he's only drinking water," we say to Jones. "Whatever!" he replies, "You fix it up. (And when you've fixed it up, *that's* the person I intend to refer to.)"<sup>9</sup>

Our suggestion is that just as, concerning the question what Jones's psychological state is in intending to refer to the man in the corner, the way it actually is with the man in question may be intended (from the "inside"! ) to *dominate* the description actually used; so too, concerning Helen's desire for ends, how it actually is with Helen's happiness also *dominates* the description 'maximizing bodily pleasure'. What Helen desires as her end (both inside and outside!) is the real good.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Another example, this time from the idea of giving an order. The tyrant orders his minion to bring him a glass of rose water immediately. But it turns out that the only way to get rose water immediately (as opposed to some orange water, which, it turns out, is much more readily available, and which the minion knows the tyrant likes nearly as well) is to blow up the East Wing of the Palace. So the minion blows it up. 'Well, sir, you wanted rose water immediately,' the minion explains to the open-mouthed tyrant. The moral of this last story is that orders are given with an understanding that the letter of the descriptions in the order is to be over-ridden by higher background ends if the explicit description is inconsistent with those background ends. An order always has an implicit rider: 'This order may in various ways be inappropriate or based on false assumptions. If so, fix it up!' Why shouldn't it be the same with a person's state of mind when he or she desires to do a specific thing?

We note, parenthetically, that Plato knew something of the dangers of following orders, or the law, to the foot of the letter: *Statesman* 294A-C, esp. C1-4, and 295B-296A.

<sup>10</sup> The idea of over-riding is of course doubly exercised when one desires to do a particular action. One's descriptions of the end may need to be over-ridden – so that it is one's real happiness that is the end. But also one's description of the action may need to be over-ridden if we are to capture the actual action done which is the explanandum. This may lead to a certain "incoherence in the desire", on which see the second last paragraph of §I below.

This sort of view of psychological states we call a “Dominance” view, by contrast with “Descriptionist” or “Separationist” views, and also by contrast with Fregean views.<sup>11</sup>

Our third argument for the conclusion that Helen still desires as her end her *real* happiness (also borrowed from *op. cit.* in n. 3 above) is this: Consider the fact that when, later on, Helen looks back over her life, she says, “You know, I used to think that maximizing bodily pleasures was the way to be happy. I now see I was wrong.” Is Helen not here recognizing that, after all, the life of maximizing bodily pleasure was only a *means* to her end *even at the time* – namely, a means to whatever her real happiness actually was? At any rate, nothing seems to stop us from taking the life of maximizing bodily pleasure *not* as Helen’s *apparent* happiness, but as the apparently best (ingredient) means to Helen’s actual end – her actual end being *her real happiness, even if that real happiness differs from what she thinks it is*.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, as far as desire for (final) ends is concerned, we claim that desire for something as a (final) end may perfectly well be read as desire for one’s *real* happiness – treating any case of desiring some *apparent* happiness which is not identical with real happiness, as a case of desiring something as an (ingredient) *means* rather than as an end. The end can thus remain one’s real happiness.

Notice that any case there is for Helen’s desiring the maximizing of

<sup>11</sup> Fregean views are also separationist, since the reference represents the outside of the object of the psychological state, the sense the inside. There will be more detail on dominance theories vs separationist theories in the work cited in n. 4 above.

<sup>12</sup> Ingredient means are not just mere instruments to getting happiness – desired only because without them one can’t get something else, happiness (cf *Lysis* 219D-220B) – but are themselves ingredients (perhaps even the single ingredient) of that happiness. See, in modern times, J.L. Ackrill, “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*”, *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1974), 339-59. Also, on there being no reason not to allow Socrates the notion of ingredient means as well as instrumental means, Penner’s “Socrates and the Early Dialogues”, in Richard Kraut (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992), n. 14.

As Penner has also remarked elsewhere (p. 192 of *op. cit.* in n. 3), the present argument – making the maximizing of bodily pleasure a means – will perhaps remind readers of the standard philosophers’ defence of the Aristotelian dictum that one never deliberates about ends, only about means. This defence has it that to deliberate is to try to settle on some means to one’s end. So if one could deliberate about whether or not to maximize one’s bodily pleasure, one must be taking one’s goal (happiness, presumably) to be other than the maximizing of bodily pleasure – presupposing the goal and deliberating about the means. (None of this blocks what anyone could want to do by way of “deliberating about alternative ends” – say, bodily pleasure, or honor, or the political life or the intellectual life.)



bodily pleasure, even as a means, will remain driven by Helen's desire for her real happiness. Thus the argument (E1)-(E3) above becomes

(E1\*) Helen wants, as her end, her *real* happiness.

(E2\*) Helen (falsely) believes that the best (ingredient) *means* to her real happiness is the maximizing of bodily pleasure.

So, at best,

(E3\*) Helen desires the maximizing of bodily pleasure as a *means* to her real happiness.<sup>13</sup>

#### Ib. *Desire for Means*

We now need to take up desire for means. If the preceding arguments suggest reason for saying that one desires as one's end one's *real* happiness rather than one's apparent happiness, we now need a reason for saying, as Socrates says in the *Gorgias*, that when one (voluntarily) does a particular action that does not result in maximizing one's real happiness, one didn't after all want to do that action. (The position at 468C2-5 is this: If the action *does* result in one's real good – if it is the best means to one's real good – then one *does* want to do the action. But if it does *not* result in one's real good – if it is *not* the best means to one's real good – one does *not* want to do the action.) Helen takes the ice cream cone thinking that action will maximize bodily pleasure and so best lead to her happiness. But actually, and unbeknownst to Helen, eating that ice cream cone is not the best means either to maximizing her real happiness or to maximizing bodily pleasure. (As for maximizing bodily pleasure, she'd do better waiting for tomorrow when she'll have a little more cash, and can get a chocolate malted instead.) How can it be said that Helen didn't want to take that ice cream cone? What *other* explanation could there be of her (intentionally) taking it?

To successfully answer this challenge, we must attribute to Socrates the following view about the identity of actions actually done:

(A3) The identity of a given particular action is fixed by all the particular properties the action actually has, including the consequences that action has; it is not fixed by particular descriptions under which the agent does it.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> We say that the argument leads to (E3\*) "at best" since the argument to which we immediately turn, about desire for means, will show that even (E3\*) is not justified.

<sup>14</sup> Thus we need a Davidsonian criterion for identity of actions, not a Goldmanian criterion. That Socrates individuates actions by means of a totality of attributes that includes consequences seems clear from the treatment of actions as means to ends at *Gorgias* 467C5-468C8. See Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980), by contrast with Alvin Goldman, *A Theory of Human*

Thus the particular action of taking the ice cream cone that Helen did – going for it full of enthusiasm – is nevertheless the action which led to her being overweight, to pimples, to the clogging of her arteries, to no maximizing of bodily pleasure (remember the chocolate malted tomorrow), and indeed to eventual misery. Did Helen want *that* action of taking the ice cream cone? If the identity of the action is given as in (A3), certainly not! Helen wanted to do an action which – in the actual world, at any rate – she couldn't do: an action of eating the ice cream cone which would lead to the maximizing of bodily pleasure and to her real happiness. But there is no such action in the actual world. (Maybe there is in some other fantasy world which she occasionally inhabits; but not in this world.) Thus (A3) gives us a defence for the claim that if Helen's action turned out badly, she didn't do what she wanted to do; she merely did what "seemed best". *Whatever* desire caused her to *do* just this act, it was not the desire to do *just this act*.

Of course to say this is still to leave unanswered the challenge, "How else are we to explain Helen's taking the ice cream cone, if not because that was what she wanted to do?" Actually, we cannot offer a detailed answer here: It is far too large a question. But the reader is owed at least a sketch of the lines along which our answer will be constructed. One part of our answer is to insist that the desire which *drives* the mistaken action *still is* the desire (from the inside!) for *her real good, even if that is different from what she thinks it is*. ("You fix it up," Helen will say.) On the other hand, any such account must notice that the action to be explained must be *the actual action done* – which precisely does *not* lead to that good. We thus have a kind of incoherence in the desire. She wants *in one and the same action* the actual ice cream cone she took (you fix it up) which leads to her real happiness (you fix it up). This poses us with a problem not unlike that of representing the state of mind of a person who, unbeknownst to himself or herself, holds inconsistent beliefs. But the latter problem is plainly one that any theory of psychological states is going to have to deal with anyway. [For *these* sorts of cases, we *shall* resort to some variant of a Fregean approach: see *op. cit.* in n. 4 above.] So the "incoherence in the desire" does not seem to us an insuperable difficulty to our proposal.

*Action* (Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliff, NJ, 1976).

Of course questions of liability and responsibility – of what *crimes or torts* one has committed in doing a particular action – are a quite different matter. They are a question of what descriptions are assigned to crimes or torts in the law, and what descriptions the agent was aware applied to the crimes or torts. In the case of crimes and torts, neither the law's concern with the agent's state of mind, nor society's concern, extends much beyond these descriptions. This is a point of which Augustine was well aware: See *De Libero Arbitrio* I.v.39-41.

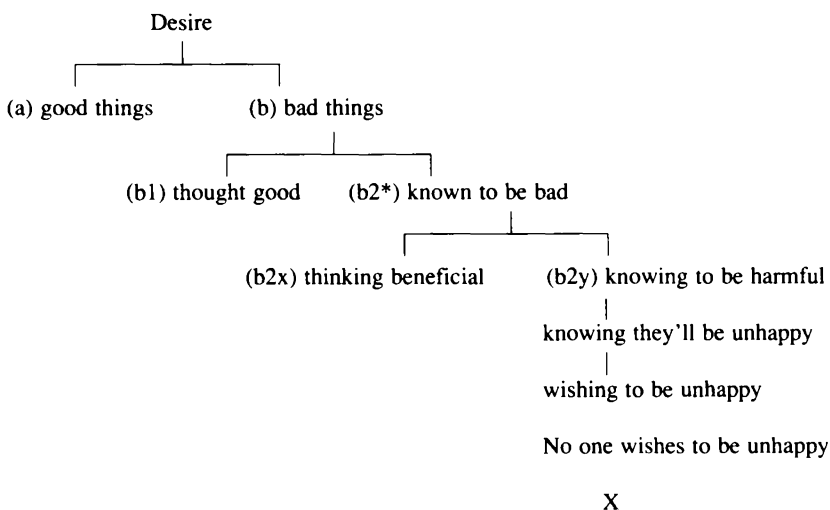
So much, then, on our way of understanding the view of desire for the good in the *Gorgias*. It is obvious that this view is inconsistent with the view, so congenial to Aristotle, Anscombe, Davidson, and Santas, that desire is for the *apparent* good, not the *real* good. In the next section, we turn to the case Santas has presented for reading this latter, Aristotelian view into the *Meno*.

## II. The Crucial Passage (*Meno* 77D7-E4); and Santas's Reading of it

The *context* of the crucial passage is this: At *Meno* 77B, Socrates elicits from Meno an account of virtue as "desiring good things and being able to (δύνασθαι, having the power to) get them". Socrates objects to the usefulness of the first half of this account: "desiring good things". You're assuming, Meno, that some people desire bad things, and some desire good things. But surely everyone desires good things? Meno replies: No, some people desire bad things. From here, the argument develops by deploying four possibilities Meno believes in, namely:

- (a) S desires good things [77B6-C2],
- (b1) S desires bad things thinking them good [77C3],
- (b2x) S desires to possess bad things knowing them bad but thinking them beneficial [77D1-2], and
- (b2y) S desires to possess bad things knowing them bad and harmful [77D2-4, 77E5-78A8].<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The argument can be represented using a tree diagram as follows:



These four possibilities are then shown to reduce to, at most, the first two, as follows. (b2y) is shown to reduce to impossibility [77E5-78B1], because such people would have to desire what they know will make them unhappy; and no one wants to be unhappy. (b2x) is shown to reduce to impossibility [77D4-7], because people who think the bad things they desire will benefit them obviously don't know that these things are bad – contradicting the original description of them as desiring bad things they know to be bad. Supposed cases of people who desire things they know to be bad, thinking they will benefit them, actually fall under case (b1) [77D7-E4].<sup>16</sup> But case (b1), the case of people who desire bad things thinking them beneficial, Socrates argues – in the crucial passage – will somehow or other reduce to desire for good things. We can thus conclude that of the two remaining cases, (a) is *overtly* desire for good things, and (b1) *reduces* somehow or other to desire for good things. So everyone desires good things.

The question here is just *how* (b1) reduces to desire for good at 77D7-E4. Santas proposes one account, we propose another. For the rest of this section, we discuss Santas's proposal; in §III we point out drawbacks to his proposal in the wider context of 77D7-E4; and in §IV we offer our own proposal as to how to take 77D7-E4.

Santas takes this passage as giving us that (b1) is a case of desiring the *apparent* good – of desiring what is in fact bad under the description 'good'. Thus Santas envisages 'Everyone desires the good' as holding of case (b1) by reading that dictum as saying that everyone desires what they desire *under the description 'good'* or as saying 'Everyone desires the *apparent* good' (i.e. what [at least] appears good to them). In the translation Santas uses, the crucial passage goes like this [the numbers, inserted for convenience in later argumentation, are ours]:

"Obviously <1> they do not desire bad things, the people who are ignorant of them, but <2> [they desire] the things which they supposed to be good things, even though <3> those things are in fact bad; so that <4> those who are ignorant of them and think them good really desire good things."

<sup>16</sup> It is true that Socrates doesn't actually *say* that case (b2x) reduces to case (b1). In some ways, indeed, it might be better to say: The people wrongly described under (b2x) are cases of desiring bad things thinking that possession of those bad things will lead to benefit – and that is what case (b1) actually amounts to as well. [So that (b1) is actually clarified by the modified (b2x) – since it introduces the means-end distinction into the idea under consideration in (b1), of desiring something thinking it good. As will become clear, we believe this clarification is important to the argument in the crucial passage. This clarification, we suggest, explains why Socrates doesn't discuss case (b1) at the point where he introduces it (c3) but waits till 77D7-E4.] But whatever one says about the relationship between (b2x) and (b1), it is hard to believe that any difference can be intended between 'desiring bad things (wrongly) thinking them good' and 'desiring bad things (wrongly) thinking them beneficial'.

Santas points out, first, an apparent contradiction between <1> (people *don't* desire bad things) and <2> + <3> (which adds up to: people *do* desire bad things); and, second, an apparent non-sequitur between <2> (people desire things they *think* good) and <4> (people desire *good* things).

Santas's solution to this pair of difficulties is brilliant and simple:

Make <1> say that people don't desire things which are in fact bad under the description 'bad' – *apparently* bad things (which are also in fact bad). Then, <2> + <3> can say people desire things which are in fact bad under the description 'good' – *apparently* good things (which are in fact bad). And then <4> can conclude – as a way of reading 'people desire good things' – that people desire [whatever they desire under the description] 'good things' – *apparently* good things. So all desire is for the good in the sense: the *apparent good*.

Now we believe that there would be strong reason to adopt this interpretation if (a) there were no other way to resolve the two difficulties Santas pointed out; if (b) that interpretation would fit Socrates' strategy in the larger argument 77B-78B as a whole; and if (c) that interpretation would fit our understanding of Socratic thought generally. But in fact we reject these three suppositions. So we shall be rejecting Santas's reading. In §III, we take up (b) and (c), and in §IV, we offer an alternative reading of the crucial passage, resolving the two difficulties (of self-contradiction and non-sequitur) which Santas raises in a quite different way.

### III. *The General Strategy of 77B-78B as a Whole; and some Broader Considerations relating to the Differences between Socratic and Aristotelian Thought Generally*

R.W. Sharples in his commentary on the *Meno* (Aris & Phillips, Warminster, Wiltshire, 1985), appears to endorse a reading of the sort of Santas's. He writes (commenting on 77D7-E4):

"The argument is simpler here than that at *Gorgias* 467a-8e. There it is argued that what people desire is the end not the means, and that people desire what is bad because they mistakenly think that it is a means to a good that they really desire; here, more simply, it is argued that people desire what is bad under the mistaken impression that it is good.

We note with approval Sharples's wish to bring the present passage into relation with the *Gorgias* passage. But we also note that, as §I above indicates, he has misread the *Gorgias* passage. The passage does not say that we desire only ends, not means; and it does not say (inconsistently with 'we don't desire means') that we desire bad things (as means to ends we really

desire). It says we desire means if they *do* lead to things good in themselves; and it says that we don't desire bad things at all.<sup>17</sup>

All the same, there is strong agreement between Sharples and ourselves that the way in which the *Gorgias* argues about desire for good is by way of means-ends hierarchies. How then is desire for good argued about in the *Meno*? Sharples thinks, like Santas, that what is involved in the *Meno* is not means to ends at all. In the *Meno*, Sharples says, "more simply, it is argued that people desire what is bad under the mistaken impression that it is good" – a sentence which might naturally read as endorsing the sort of view Santas proposes, that people desire what is bad under the description 'good'. [For qualifications on what Sharples may have intended, see n. 17.] As against this reading, we shall suggest (in §IV of the paper) that means to ends are involved in the *Meno* as well. (We have already foreshadowed this view in n. 16 above, in pointing out that Socrates doesn't discuss "desiring bad things thinking them good" till he has rephrased this option as "desiring bad things thinking that possession of those good things will be beneficial"

<sup>17</sup> We initially took Sharples's conclusion about the *Meno*, in the passage quoted,

here, more simply, it is argued that people desire what is bad under the mistaken impression that it is good

to plainly commit him to the view that in the *Meno*, one can desire bad things under the description 'good'. But correspondence with Sharples has convinced us that a subtler reading may be suggested in Sharples's remark on the *Gorgias*,

... people desire what is bad because they mistakenly think that it is a means to a good that they really desire.

Here the first occurrence of 'desire' may be taken to be intended to yield an inverted-commas sense of 'desire' ("desire – as they think"), contrasting with 'really desire' [= 'desire' in the ordinary sense] later in the sentence. On this reading, Sharples is certainly not committed to Santas's position on the *Gorgias*, according to which to desire the best end is to desire the *apparently* best end. [See Santas, p. 317, n. 24 with p. 190 ("done for the sake of possessing what the agent *considers* a good"); also pp. 223-4 ("they want them if they *think* they will bring benefits or goods", "they are wanted if they are *thought* to lead to the possession of good things"). (Our italics.) ]. But then, of course, Sharples's remark on the *Meno* about "[desiring] what is bad under the mistaken impression that it is good" would also have to be read in the inverted comma sense. So read, Sharples's remarks would lend no support to the view of Santas and others that we can desire what is bad under the description 'good'. And so read, the only issue Sharples's remarks would raise, as far as the *Meno* is concerned, would be whether the means-end distinction is present in the *Meno* as well as in the *Gorgias* (as we say), or not (as Sharples says here).

We note also, just to be quite clear, that Sharples's contrast between 'desire' and 'really desire' in the *Gorgias*, as taken here, is precisely not identifiable with Dodds's contrast between desires in the ordinary sense (desires of the empirical self) and desires "in the restricted senses of 'true will' ". Penner has argued against any such "restricted sense" or any such ambiguity in 'desire', in "Power and Desire", p. 175ff, esp. 199, with 177, 178, 191.].

– that is, as desiring to possess bad things *as a means to benefit.*)

We begin by raising some problems with Santas's reading, problems which will point us in the direction of a second possibility for interpreting the crucial passage.

If Santas wishes to claim that 'desiring good things' in case (b1) is desiring bad things under the description 'good' (*apparently* good things which are in fact bad), and so tries to interpret 'Everyone desires the good' as 'Everyone desires [whatever they desire under the description] "good things"' (or as 'Everyone desires the *apparent* good'), then he must argue that case (a) – desiring good things – is actually either a case of desiring good things *under the description 'good'*, or (more simply) a case of desiring *apparently* good things. Otherwise, he must make Socrates' thesis that 'Everyone desires good things' rest upon an ambiguity: Desire for good will be the desire for *really* good things in case (a), while in case (b1) it will be either desire for whatever one desires *under the description 'good'*, or desire for *apparently* good things.

But it seems certain that case (a) is *not* a case of desiring things under the description 'good'. If it were, we should have to wonder where in the text we were to find words for "under the description 'good' ". From a linguistic point of view, it will be far easier on Santas's reading to take (a) as 'desiring *apparently* good things', with the 'apparently' simply *understood*.<sup>18</sup> But this also will not work. The whole point of Meno's dividing desire into (a) desiring good things and (b) desiring bad things must, even on Santas's view, be (a) desiring things that are *in fact* good and (b) desiring things that are *in fact* bad. [See the diagram in n. 15.]

So Santas's view of the Socratic thesis 'Everyone desires the good' can only be that *the Socratic thesis is ambiguous*, saying that there are two cases: (a) which speaks of desire for *really* good things, and (b1) which speaks of desire for *apparently* good things. This seems to us a most unfortunate result, both philosophically and exegetically.

We are more tempted by the reading of the overall strategy of the passage in R.S. Bluck's commentary (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1961), 257. Bluck writes

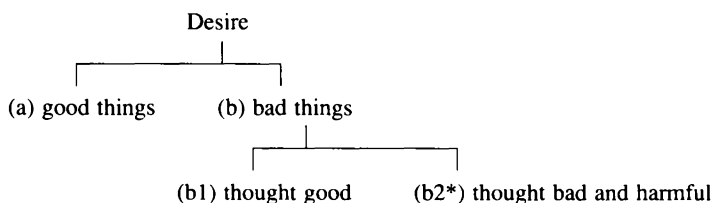
<sup>18</sup> Even though 'under the description' *could* be plausibly read into the text in <1>, <2>, and the antecedent of <4>, the impossibility of honestly reading 'under the description "good"' into the text at 77C1, which we note here, applies also to 77C2, 78A6, A8, B1-2. The best Santas can do is to imagine an 'apparently' being *read into* the text at these passages. Such imagined linguistic supplements are, at any rate, what Santas's reading of the crucial passage will require within the larger passage. ['Apparently' is the only understood linguistic supplement that is at all plausible for Santas in the consequent of <4>: 'they desire good things'.]



“Socrates . . . argues (i) that anyone who thinks that κακά are beneficial must be failing to recognizing κακά for what they are, and must *really* desire τὰ ἀγαθὰ (77D-E); and (ii) that anyone who *is* aware that κακά do harm to the person who acquires them can hardly desire κακά (77E-78B). Therefore no one desires κακά.”

Bluck does not here address the issue of real good vs apparent good. But it is plain that he is taking his (ii), our (b2y), to be arguing that no one desires *really* bad things; and it is plain that in his (i), he is taking κακά and ἀγαθὰ to be *really* bad things and *really* good things. (The talk of “recognizing κακά for what they are” nails down the fact that the κακά are *really* bad things.<sup>19</sup> So surely, then, the contrast with really bad things must be *really* good things.) We think not only that Bluck must have had this reading, in terms of really good things and really bad things, in mind; but also that his reading of the overall strategy is correct – that this will have been the strategy Socrates had in mind. It follows that what we must argue, in our reading of the crucial passage (and what Bluck needs for his reading), is that case (b1) reduces to case (a) – desire for *really* good things.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> On Santas’s reading, by contrast, the reference to *knowledge* must seem curiously irrelevant. Plato’s optimum strategy, if what he had in mind were what Santas says he had in mind, would have been, instead of the tree diagram in n. 15 above, the following:



This point is taken up again in the second last paragraph of §IV below.

The reference to knowledge in the argument – in the choice, for example, to get at (b1) only via first trying (b2x), which (we have already suggested in n. 16) brings in means to ends, and which, by the use of knowledge rather sets us onto the path of being concerned with *really* good things and *really* bad things – is crucial to our reading of this passage. The resulting notion of desire is that of “desire (both inside and outside) for good things” which we talked about in §I above.

<sup>20</sup> One might think it just obvious, looking at the diagram in n. 15, that the fact that possibility (b1) is not reduced to impossibility commits Socrates to the admission that one sometimes desires things that are in fact bad. This would however be a serious mistake. Socrates is not committed to (b1). This is a possibility introduced, not by Socrates, but by Meno – and in opposition to Socrates’ claim that everyone desires good things, i.e., (arguably?!) that everyone falls under possibility (a). So the mere statement of (b1) does nothing here to commit Socrates to the claim that people sometimes desire things that are in fact bad. The entire matter turns upon just how possibility (b1) reduces to desiring good things. If it does so in the way Santas claims, by simply identifying



But before actually making the argument in connection with (b1) itself, Bluck's (i), let us work backwards towards (b1), by looking at the reduction to absurdity of possibility (b2y), Bluck's (ii). Here we are concerned with the possibility that some people desire bad things knowing they will be harmed by them [77E5-78A8]. The argument, quite simply, is that if they know they will be harmed by these bad things, they know they will be made miserable and unhappy by them. But no one wants to be unhappy. So no one wants bad things [knowing that the bad things will harm them] – at least if no one wishes to be unhappy. For what else is it to be unhappy but to desire bad things and get them?

Now, if Santas is right that (b1) is about allowing the desire of bad things *thought* good, he must suppose that (b2y) is about disallowing desire for bad things *thought* bad [cf n. 19 above]. So the point that no one wants to be unhappy must be the point that no one wants what *appears* to them to be unhappiness; and to be unhappy must be to desire *apparently* bad things and get them. But this is plainly unsatisfactory. What if the apparently bad things are really good? Will it really be unhappiness to desire and get things which, though they appear bad, *are really good*? Surely that is not Socrates' intention. His intention must be that unhappiness is desiring *really* bad things and getting them.

We notice here also the often remarked deliberate parody, in this account of unhappiness, of Meno's account, at 77B, of virtue as the desire for good things and the ability (or power: δύνασθαι) to get them. Could Meno really have intended to suggest that virtue is desire for, and ability to get, *apparently* good things? Surely it is clear here too that it is the *really* good which is intended.<sup>21</sup>

But if our reading of the reduction to absurdity of (b2y) is correct, then

"desiring good things" here as desiring things *thought* good, then Socrates *is* committed to cases of desiring things that are in fact bad. If, however, (b1) reduces to desiring good things by reducing to case (a) – as we shall claim – then (b1) does not leave us with any cases of desiring things that are in fact bad. In the analysis of the argument provided by Reinhold Merkelbach in his German translation of the *Meno* (Athenäum, Frankfurt/M, 1988)], he also reduces (b1) to (a) – though not, as we have done, by way of (b2x).

<sup>21</sup> Of course, it may be said that Meno is a silly fellow. But Plato surely has a purpose in having Meno put forward this particular account of virtue. Penner has suggested elsewhere that Socrates himself thinks that virtue is the ability (power, or knowledge) to get good things – even though he refutes Meno when Meno defends that view (given that Meno thinks that wealth and high office are good things). If so, then Plato must want us to be considering the ability to get *really* good things, not just apparently good things. [See Penner's "Socrates on Virtue and Motivation", in E. Lee, A. Mourelatos, and R. Rorty (Eds.), *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy presented to Gregory Vlastos* (Assen, 1973), 149-50.]

its conclusion, that no one desires *really* bad things, makes it virtually certain that (b1) can only be intended to reduce to desire for *really* good things (a). For consider: The reductio of (b2y) concludes [78A6-B2]

“In that case, Meno, *no one* [repeated negative: A4] wishes τὰ κακά [bad things: general] if indeed no[one] wishes to be such [i.e., unhappy]. For what else is it to be miserable than to desire τὰ κακά and to acquire [them]?”

“You’re probably right, Socrates, and [probably] no one wishes τὰ κακά.”

Now the conclusion “. . . *no one* wishes τὰ κακά . . .” is surely intended to be the conclusion not only of the reductio of (b2y), but also of the entire argument about desire for good. The idea is:

In all the other cases we have already shown that no one desires τὰ κακά. So now, reducing this last possibility to absurdity, we can conclude that *no one at all* – in any of the possibilities we have considered – desires τὰ κακά.

But in the case of (b2y) this says ‘No one desires *really* bad things’. So that must be what is being said of all the cases: none of them is a case of desiring really bad things. (If anyone doubts that ‘*no one* wishes τὰ κακά’ concludes the whole argument, they should consider Meno’s restatement of the conclusion “You’re probably right, Socrates, and [probably] no one wishes τὰ κακά.” Meno is surely granting that in *none* of the cases they have considered – (b1), (b2x) or (b2y) – do they have a case of desiring bad things.) Therefore, the conclusion to (b1) must also be: no one desires *really* bad things. Thus our reading of the (b2y) argument actually requires that (b1) *not* be read in accordance with Santas’s reading.

One final point about the context which invites wider reflection on Socratic ethics generally, and indeed which shows that ‘desires good things’ in Meno’s proposed account of virtue must be desiring *really* good things. After the larger argument with which we have been concerned concludes at 78B2, Socrates says to Meno,

“Surely you were just now saying that virtue is wishing good things and being able [to get them]. . . And surely in this statement, the wishing, [we have shown], belongs to everyone. In *this* way [that is, with respect to the wishing], no one is any better than anyone else. . . But then it’s clear that – if indeed anyone is better than anyone else – it will be by virtue of their ability [to get the good things wished].” [77B3-8]

We suggest this is just the Socratic view familiar to us from elsewhere, when we put together the theses that

Virtue is knowledge<sup>22</sup> and vice ignorance

<sup>22</sup> Cf *Lesser Hippias* 375D8-9: knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) or power (δύναμις). Cf “the ability (δύνασθαι) to get the good things” in Meno’s account of virtue at 77B3-5.

and that

no one errs willingly.

The point is that people do not differ ethically in their desires, wills, or characters, but only in their knowledge.<sup>23</sup> This position – in such stark contrast to what we find in Aristotle – *could not* be the view that we are all the same ethically in that we desire our *apparent* good. For our apparent goods *do* differ, as Aristotle noted,<sup>24</sup> and make us differ in the quality of our desires. It is only if desire for good in the *Meno* is desire for the real good, that it will be the case that the good do not differ from the bad in their desires, but only in their intellects. Lamentably enough, Socrates is just about the last philosopher in the West to think that the virtuous differ from those who are not virtuous in the quality of their understanding only.<sup>25</sup> With the advent of Plato's irrational desires, we begin to have a differentiation of good people from bad people in the quality of their *wills*. In whatever other ways Plato and Aristotle might differ from Kant, on this point they are at one against Socrates. But to return to the present point, Socrates differs from Aristotle precisely on the point whether the good we all desire is the real or the apparent good.

The contextual considerations suggested in the present section seem to us to make it virtually certain that Socrates' intention in the crucial passage 77D7-E4 must have been to reduce (b1) to (a). It remains to be shown that it is possible so to read the passage, giving alternative ways out of the surface contradiction and the surface non-sequitur which led Santas to propose his reading in the first place. To this we turn in the next section.

#### IV. *An Alternative Reading of the Crucial Passage: 77D7-E4*

We offer the following translation of the crucial passage – with one change in punctuation from the traditional text in Burnet, Bluck, and others.

“Well then, it's clear that

<1\*>    these people [whatever we may go on to say about the others: μὲν] don't desire τὰ κακά,<sup>26</sup> the people who don't know them [i.e., that they are κακά].

<sup>23</sup> See the works cited in n. 21 and in n. 12 above.

<sup>24</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* III.5.1114a31-b25. And in the passage just preceding, 1113b14-1114a31, notice Aristotle's explicit rejection of the Socratic view that no one is willingly bad (that is, bad due to their desires as opposed to their intellects).

<sup>25</sup> Chrysippus and Spinoza spring to mind as possible exceptions here.

<sup>26</sup> We grant that the reference to bad things in <1>, and to bad things in <4> is *general*. But this should not encourage readers to contrast these general desires for bad and good things with desiring *particular* bad and good things – as if the former were for *apparent*-

Instead [ἀλλὰ: strongly adversative],

<2\*> they desire those things which [we agree]<sup>27</sup> they think good.<sup>28</sup>

But,

<3\*> these very things [ταῦτά γε] in fact *are* [position of ἔστιν] κακά.

So, then,

<4\*> [this first group,] those who don't know them [τὰ κακά], and think that they are ἀγαθά, clearly desire τὰ ἀγαθά."

On any reading, the dynamic of the passage is a movement from *desires τὰ κακά* in <1\*> to *desires τὰ ἀγαθά* in <4\*>. If the latter is to be *desires apparent ἀγαθά*, as Santas has it, then the former must be *desires apparent κακά*. We think this a very unlikely way of taking <1\*>. Far more likely is that <1\*> is saying "those who don't know the bad things that they are bad

ly bad and good things and the latter for *really* bad and good things.

The idea to which we are objecting here is this: making (i) desiring good things *in general* opaque (or, better, oblique), and making (ii) desiring *particular* good things transparent. We are not ourselves sympathetic to this general use of opaque (or oblique) vs transparent. This usage presupposes that desire must be treated according to the schema 'desires object *o* under description *D*', with the *o* position being transparent and the *D* position being opaque (or oblique). The whole idea of the present account (§I above) of the *Gorgias*' treatment of desire to do something, is to get away from that descriptionist or separationist approach to psychological states in general, and to desire states in particular. We are most reluctant to think that one can think of oneself as desiring good things *generally* without thinking of oneself as desiring particular good things (even if the particular good things are unknown to one).

The generality involved in <1\*> is surely rather this: that these people are not cases of (the kind) *people desiring bad things*; and the generality involved in <4\*> is that these people *are* cases of (the kind) *people desiring good things*. When one says that "don't desire bad things" in <1\*> and "desire good things" in <4\*> are *general*, there is no *linguistic* reason for saying Socrates is talking about desiring *apparently* bad and good things.

<sup>27</sup> "which they were thinking good": We take this as a philosophical imperfect [Herbert Weir Smyth's "imperfect of a truth just recognized", in *Greek Grammar* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1920), §1902]. This seems to us better than any other option we can think of for interpreting the imperfect.

The (alleged) truth just recognized (that they desire things they think good) is presumably here identified with the claim at 77D5-6 that the people in question think the bad things *benefit*. See the suggestion in n. 16 above that Socrates is identifying 'thinking bad things good' with 'thinking the bad things will benefit'. (Penner wishes to thank Arthur Adkins and Elizabeth Asmis for pressing him on the question of this philosophical imperfect – without supposing he has satisfied them.)

<sup>28</sup> Here we punctuate with a full stop, instead of with the comma Burnet and Bluck use. The significance of this change of punctuation will emerge directly.

do not desire the really bad things; and then <4\*> says: “Those who don’t know them, thinking them to be good, [aren’t amongst those who desire τὰ κακά, but instead are among those who] desire τὰ ἀγαθά.” Such a reading, we have seen, is strongly suggested by the contextual considerations adduced in the preceding section. The big problem for us might seem to be how to read the passage without having to admit that <2\*> + <3\*> gives us, as a single unit, “desires bad things thinking them good”.

We have come to doubt that <2\*> + <3\*> should be taken as the unit: “They desire things they think good, though they are in fact bad.” The Greek supposed to yield “though they are in fact bad”, ἔστιν δὲ ταῦτά γε κακά, does not seem to us to be quite so parenthetical and unemphatic as this English translation suggests. A more suitable Greek version for ‘though they are in fact bad’ might be ὄντα κακά – or some other phrase rather simpler than ἔστιν δὲ ταῦτά γε κακά. Why, for example, on Santas’s view, do we have the emphasis which the γε gives to the ταῦτά in “though they are in fact bad”?

Further to our inclination to take <3\*> as no mere parenthetical addition to <2\*>, we suggest a small departure from Burnet’s punctuation between <2\*> and <3\*>. We write a full stop there instead of the usual comma. On this reading, we suggest, the emphatic ταῦτά γε is better motivated. The thought we attribute to Socrates here goes something like this:

You might think that the object of desire is, not ‘bad things’, but ‘things thought good’. But *those very things* in fact *are* bad things. [So the new suggestion, that the object of desire is *things thought good* doesn’t in fact get us anywhere, given that in <1\*> we have ruled out the claim that what we desire are (really) bad things.]

From here we get a good motivation for the “So” that introduces <4\*>. The idea is: both *bad things* and *things thought good* have been eliminated as candidates for the objects of desire – *things thought good* turning out to just *be* the *bad things* eliminated in <1\*>. So all that is left is (*really*) *good things*.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Santas reads <4\*> as follows: these people, not knowing these things are bad, and thinking them good, [in thinking them good show that they] “desire good things”. Here the second dependent clause, “[desiring them] *thinking them good*,” is taken to *identify* what “desiring good things” is. As against this, we suggest that no one can doubt that the point of the first dependent clause, ‘not knowing the bad things’, is

not knowing the bad things, *don’t desire them*.

Why would one not also naturally take the second dependent clause as adding even if they are thought good?

The implication would then be:

They don’t even desire the things *thought* good. What they desire is rather good things.

Thus, the crucial passage as a whole goes like this: We are trying to identify the objects of desire in case (b1). <1\*> rules out the hypothesis that what is desired is (*really*) *bad things*. <2\*> tries a quite different hypothesis: that what is desired is, instead, *things thought good*. Then <3\*>, taken here as a new sentence,<sup>30</sup> says: Unfortunately, *these very things thought good* in fact *are* bad things. But (*really*) *bad things* have already, by <1\*>, been ruled out as the objects of desire. *Therefore* (ὥστε) what is desired must instead be (*really*) *good things*.<sup>31</sup>

This seems to us to make good sense of 77D7-B4, while at the same keeping this passage consistent with the natural reading of the wider passage 77B-78B and the natural way to differentiate Socratic and Aristotelian ethics.

One problem remains. We read <4\*> as saying that, after all, these cases (of people Meno says desire bad things thinking they will benefit) are cases of desiring really good things. What really good things? Our interpretation certainly needs to provide a satisfactory answer to this question.

Let us remember that alternative (b1), *desiring bad things thinking them good* has been clarified by 77C5-D7 as *desiring to possess bad things (wrongly) thinking that they will benefit*. [Recall that case (b1) is not dealt with when it first comes up (at 77C3).<sup>32</sup> Instead it is ignored while Socrates asks about (b2): desiring bad things known to be bad. Isn't desire for such things desire to possess them, and indeed desire to possess them either (b2x) (wrongly) thinking they will benefit or (b2y) knowing they will harm? We thus have here (at 77C4-D7), immediately preceding the crucial

<sup>30</sup> Amongst older editors we were able to consult, Schmelzer, Bekker and Schanz, like Burnet, also use a comma between our <2\*> and our <3\*> – Bekker translating the relevant passage along Santas's lines, as "*sed illa potius, quae bona esse putaverint, cum tamen mala sint*". On the other hand, Ast uses a colon – also translating, along the lines of our suggestion, '*sed ea quae arbitrentur bona esse; sunt vero haec quidem mala*'. Fabricius (1781) splits the difference, using a full stop as we do, but translating, along Santas's lines, '*sed illa potius, quae bona esse putarint, cum tamen mala sint*'. Henricus Aristippus (twelfth century, in *Plato Latinus*) translates more along the lines of our suggestion: "*immo ea quae estimabant bona esse: sunt autem hec mala.*"

<sup>31</sup> Thus on our construal, the question at issue in the crucial passage is one of getting correct identity beliefs about the objects of desire. (The object of desire *is not* this bad thing [<1\*>], but *is*, at best, this thing thought good [<2\*>]; but then, since what is thought good *is* this same bad thing [<3\*>], the object of desire *is not* this bad thing (which is also thought good), but rather *is* some really good thing [<4\*>].) That the question here should be raised in the form of successive identity questions (compare the treatment of false belief at *Theaetetus* 187-200 in terms of identity beliefs) seems to us quite likely – by comparison with raising the question in terms of the modern form 'desires object *o* under description *D*'.

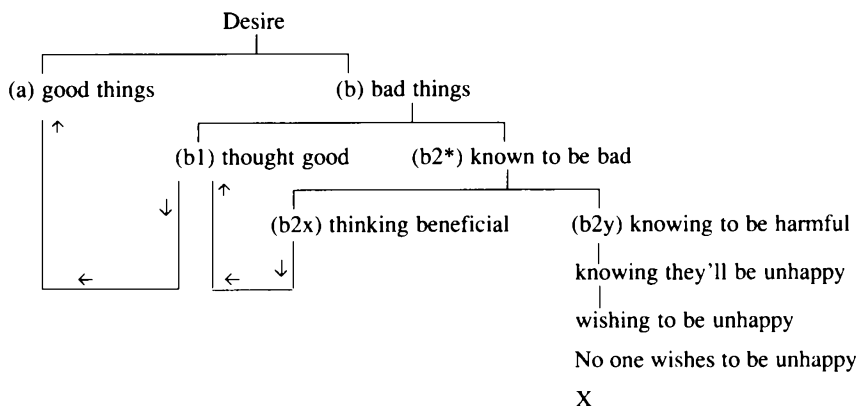
<sup>32</sup> Why not, on Santas's view? Cf n. 19 above.

passage, just the idea of desiring bad things (wrongly) thinking of them as a means to benefit which our reading requires.] Accordingly, we think that this context provides clear justification for taking the really good things involved to be: the benefits the people in question (wrongly) think they will get from possessing the bad things in question.

The suggestion that the *Meno* construes desire for something in terms of means-end hierarchies – desiring to possess something as a means to benefit, and indeed as a means to happiness – is further confirmed by the reduction of (b2y). For in the reduction of (b2y), the desire for something known to be bad is conceived of as desire to possess something which leads to harm, which in turn leads to misery and unhappiness – and the fact that no one desires (the end) unhappiness is given as a reason why no one desires (as a means) what leads to harm and so to that unhappiness. So too, in the reduction of (b1) – as clarified – to desire for good, we think it entirely natural to suppose that Socrates had in mind to argue that in case (b1) what we have is people alleged by Meno to desire something which is in fact bad as a means to benefit and so to happiness.<sup>33</sup> But then the benefit and the happiness can be construed as *real* goods which the desirer wrongly thinks the bad things they are going for will lead to.<sup>34,35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> We note that our suggestion that the *Meno* takes desire for something as desire to possess that thing, and to possess it as a means to benefit and ultimately to happiness, is well confirmed outside of the *Meno* and even aside from the *Gorgias*. See *Symposium* 204E2-205A3 and *Euthydemus* 280B5-8 with D1-E2. The *Meno*, the *Euthydemus* and the *Symposium* all construe desire for something in terms of means-ends hierarchies of the form: desire to possess as a means to benefit as a means to happiness.

<sup>34</sup> Suppose (b1) reduces to (a), as we claim. Then, if there had also been a diagram in the sand here (of the sort at n. 15 above), we might have imagined Socrates, when he articulates <2\*>, switching from pointing at option (b2x) to option (b1) – further motivation for the contrast presupposed in ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνον – and then, when he articulates <4\*>, switching from pointing at (b1) to pointing at (a).





## Conclusion

We conclude (i) that the overall strategy of 77B-78B requires that (b1) reduce to desire for *really* good things, and not just *apparently* good things, as Santas supposes; (ii) that the differences between Socratic and Aristotelian ethics generally, along with the suggestion that virtuous people and people who are not virtuous do not differ in their desires but only in their degree of knowledge, require that Socrates think of desire for the good as desire for the *real* good rather than desire for the *apparent* good; and that (iii) the crucial passage 77D7-E4 not only *need* not be read in accordance with Santas's reading, as speaking of desire for things thought good (though they are in fact bad), but *can* be read, in some ways more plausibly, as denying that one can desire bad things, even when one thinks them good. What one desires is the benefits and the happiness one wrongly thinks possession of the bad things is a means to. Thus the account of desire for good in the *Meno* is not after all inconsistent with the account of desire for good in the *Gorgias*.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For discussion of a reading of Santas's paper different from our own, see the Appendix below.

<sup>36</sup> Earlier drafts of this paper (by Penner) were read at the University of Wisconsin and the University of Chicago in Spring 1992, and Lawrence University in February 1993. Penner would like to thank those audiences, as well as a number of other friends, colleagues, and students, both undergraduate and graduate. He is especially conscious of debts to Ruth Saunders, Donna McCormick, Berent Enç, Dennis Stampe, Paula Gottlieb, Marty Barrett, LaVerne Shelton, Arthur Adkins, Ian Mueller, Richard Kraut, Elizabeth Asmis, Scott Senn, Scott Senalik, to very useful correspondence with Naomi Reshotko, and above all to the writings of Santas which have been a continuing source of scholarly and philosophical stimulation over the years. We are also both grateful to R.W. Sharples for highly illuminating correspondence.

A word about our joint authorship. The philosophical strategy of the paper, and a number of the exegetical arguments, originated with Penner, who also did the writing; but he accepted so many changes in the actual discussion of the text of the *Meno*, and profited so much from Rowe's reading of the passage, his advice, criticisms, resistance, and alternative arguments, that it was becoming impossible to acknowledge in detail all the ways in which Rowe had influenced the paper. In the circumstances, joint authorship seemed the appropriate way to represent the present draft. (Rowe should not be thought, however, to be committed to the full range of underlying philosophical views indicated by Penner, especially in §1 and in the Appendix below, nor to all of Penner's claims, in articles cited here, as to just how Socrates differs from Plato.) We are both extremely grateful to the Classics Department at Madison, as well as the University of Wisconsin Humanistic Trust Foundation, who together made possible Rowe's visit to Madison during a sabbatical term.



*Appendix: More on Santas's Reading of the Meno and the Gorgias.*

Before leaving the above treatment of Santas's position, we should note that Naomi Reshotko's recent "The Socratic Theory of Motivation", *Apeiron*, xxv, no. 3, Sept. 1992, pp. 145-169, argues that Santas's approach to desire in the *Meno* and the *Gorgias* is actually *consistent* with Penner's reading of the *Gorgias* in "Desire and Power" (and so with our position in the present article). See Reshotko, pp. 149-50, esp. n. 7. Plainly, if this is right, the present article is radically misconceived. Some comment is called for.

Reshotko's paper, which contains a number of theses about the views of Socrates (and a number of forms of explanation) which she shares with Penner, nevertheless misconstrues one feature of the theoretical apparatus with which Penner is working in his "Desire and Power". She claims, in effect, that "Desire and Power" reads 'S desires the good' transparently. [See her remark about understanding desire for the good as *not* involving any reference to the point of view of the subject (p. 147); and her remark about "our perception of an object . . . play[ing] no role in determining whether or not we desire that object" (p. 149). This is exactly the idea of transparency captured by the idea of an "outside" of an object of desire which is completely separated from any "inside", in the Separationist "Inside-Outside" view. On the "inside-outside" view (n. 2 above as well as the text to notes 8-11), the "inside" of the object is desired opaquely (or, better, obliquely) while the "outside" is desired transparently.] True, (a) Penner is denying that the *Gorgias* is to be read in terms of a Fregean oblique sense or in accordance with the 'desires object *o* under description *D*' schema; and, true, (b) Penner does give an account of the identity conditions of action which will ensure that the sentence 'Helen desires this ice cream cone' will come out false in some circumstances – as when the ice cream cone in question is one which leads to harm and unhappiness for Helen. That ice cream cone Helen does *not* desire. (It is these two facts, in themselves compatible with Reshotko's reading of the *Gorgias*, which lead her thus to misconstrue what Penner is doing here.) But to be quite clear here, Penner is not rejecting the inside-outside view just to opt for the transparentist view Reshotko endorses, where there are no insides to objects of desire, only outsides. What we here call the Dominance view, with its reference to the subject wanting any mistakes in the subject's picture of the object of desire to be over-ridden by how it *is* with the object of desire, certainly cannot be taken to suppose that attitudes to the good (and pictures of the good) do not enter into desire for good. (How could wanting mistakes in one's picture of something to be over-ridden not involve an attitude to the thing in question? See also the talk, in the text to nn. 8-10 above, of desire "both inside and outside" for the good. To go back to the example just above, it is true *from the inside* that Helen does not desire the ice cream cone that will make her unhappy! It is *her attitude towards* her own real happiness that makes this claim true.) The point is not: to drop altogether talk of the "inside" of the object of desire. It is rather: to drop talk of an "inside" that is utterly separated from the "outside" (that, for example, has its identity independently of what the "outside" is). We precisely do *not* give up altogether on the idea of the subject having a conception of the object of desire. Indeed we cannot see how there could be such a notion of desire. [Thus it is even arguable that theorists who, like Frege or Santas, hold that there is an oblique notion of desire *can have no grounds whatever* for believing in a transparent sense of desire. For on such a separationist or descriptionist view, *either* (a) the supposed transparent sense of 'I want a sloop' quantifies over senses, in which case the inside-outside view must grant that the verb 'want' is still to be read obliquely; *or* (b) the transparent sense of 'want' involves *no attitude whatever* to the object desired – which we find

entirely implausible as a theory of desire or of any other psychological state. By contrast, as we have just pointed out, on the “Dominance” view, there *is* an attitude to the object of desire. [It is in our opinion a historical anomaly that produced this superfluous “transparent” sense of psychological verbs amongst those who believe in obliquity. The notion of transparency was introduced by Quine to contrast with the notion of *opacity* – as *opposed* to obliquity. This is understandable on *Quine’s* view – which is utterly sceptical as to agents’ conceptions of the objects of their psychological states. For such sceptics, a notion of transparency is *not* superfluous. But for those who give indirect or oblique treatments of psychological contexts, the notion *is* superfluous.]

We come now to Reshotko’s mistake in suggesting that Santos’s view is consistent with the view in “Desire and Power” (merely “obscured” in Santos’s exposition, by Santos’s adding an oblique or indirect sense of ‘desire’: Reshotko, n. 7). She rightly sees in Santos’s talk of the *actual* object of desire, as shown by behavior, an appeal to what I have been calling a transparent sense of ‘desire’. But then she infers that Santos’s view is compatible with Penner’s view of ‘desires the good’ (which, as we have seen, she also takes to be transparent). But Santos does *not* hold, as Reshotko does, that everyone transparently desires the good – the trick done with Penner’s account of the identity of actions. On the contrary, on Santos’s view, when Helen desires an ice cream cone as a means to the good, but it turns out to lead not to the good, but to the bad, we have only the following two options: (a) Helen *obliquely* (*not*: transparently) desires the real good; and (b) Helen transparently (behaviorally) desires the ice cream cone that leads her to the bad. See, for example, Santos’s conclusion at p. 188:

In sum, we can say (using the terminology introduced) that what Socrates has tried to show is that in no case are bad things the intended objects of people’s desires [cf “oblique”], though in some cases they are the actual objects [cf “transparent”].

This flatly contradicts the view taken up both in “Desire and Power” and in the present paper, according to which no one ever desires what is in fact bad. And it flatly contradicts Reshotko’s view as well.

We conclude that Reshotko’s attempt to make Santos’s reading consistent with Penner’s views in “Desire and Power”, or indeed with our views in the present article, cannot succeed. It would, after all, be surprising if it could. Santos’s reading of the *Meno* on desire has represented, for decades, the best treatment of Socrates on desire in the literature; and plainly it is in the spirit of the Aristotle-Frege-Anscombe-Davidson sort of approach to desire that is all but universal in our time. For this reading of the *Meno* – as indeed for other readings of early Plato – the field of Greek philosophy is deeply in Santos’s debt. For good or ill, it is this reading, despite all its plausibility and its many merits, which the present interpretation is rejecting.

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